michigan league of conservation voters

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Testimony on SB 248

Michigan House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation

May 1, 2012

Dear Representatives,

The Michigan League of Conservation Voters opposes SB 248, in particular its proposed effect of placing a cap on the amount of land the state may own, manage, and protect. The language requiring a unique vote to lift the land cap in the future is especially concerning.

To be clear, we wholeheartedly agree that a comprehensive land acquisition policy would benefit the state. That said, an arbitrary limit on the amount of public land that can be owned by the people of Michigan has very little connection to the development of that policy. If the goal is truly to have a comprehensive land acquisition policy, then we would support that kind of unadulterated bill or the inclusion of an automatic sunset on the land cap can be triggered once the land acquisition policy is implemented.

There are sincere consequences to a land cap that is sustained or discarded independently of a holistic acquisition policy. It will either restrict the state from acquiring important holdings in areas which would benefit from public management, or it will force the sale of existing public land in other areas of the state, much of which is for recreational purposes that contribute to the essence of Pure Michigan. Regardless, a cap restricts the potential of Pure Michigan - both the spirit of it and the economic benefits of it.

A legislatively-removed cap is a poor means by which to manage state resources. Requiring legislative approval in order to repeal the land cap will create uncertainty in the drafting of an impartial land acquisition plan. It places it at the whim of the legislature, rather than being directed by the requirements of proper and sustainable land management practices. A land cap that can only be lifted by the legislature - rather than automatically sunset or never implemented in the first place - holds best practices hostage to political pressure.

There are some good ideas in the substitute bill offered today. The detailed acquisition plan, as described in Section 7, would clearly benefit the people of Michigan and their natural resources. We support this committee's efforts to reach that long-overdue goal.

Creating a strategic land acquisition plan is a good idea, but hampering its potential success with a land cap that can only be removed by a separate vote is bad policy. The land that is managed by the State of Michigan right now is some of the most pristine, well-maintained, and most enjoyed land on our great peninsula. The acquisition or sale of that land must be guided by best practices, sound planning, and community input. An artificial ceiling that forces the trading of one valuable parcel for another or discourages important future acquisitions is detrimental to Pure Michigan and all that it entails.

Once again, we currently oppose SB248 based on the language requiring legislative action for the removal of the land cap.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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